

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

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EEOC SUES ALAMO CAR RENTAL FOR RELIGIOUS BIAS

Post-9/11 Backlash Suit Say Muslim Employee Prevented from Wearing Head Scarf

PHOENIX - The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) today announced the filing of a post-9/11 backlash discrimination lawsuit under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 against Alamo Car Rental, owned and operated by Ft. Lauderdale-based Alamo Rent-A-Car LLC and ANC Rental Corporation. The religious bias suit was filed by the federal agency's Phoenix District Office on behalf of a Muslim employee who was denied a workplace accommodation for her sincerely held Islamic religious beliefs and practices.

The suit (EEOC v Alamo Rent -A-Car, LLC; ANC Rental Corporation, CIV 02 1908 PHX ROS) states that Bilan Nur, a customer service representative who had worked for Alamo since 1999, sought permission to cover her head with a scarf during the holy month of Ramadan, consistent with her religious tenets. Alamo had previously permitted Ms. Nur to wear a head covering during Ramadan in 1999 and 2000. However, during December 2001, Alamo refused to permit Ms. Nur to observe her religious beliefs. Instead, Alamo told Ms. Nur that the company dress code prohibited wearing a scarf. Notwithstanding this representation, Alamo had no such policy. Alamo subsequently disciplined, suspended, and terminated Ms. Nur for failure to remove her head scarf.

"This lawsuit serves as stark reminder to employers that the sincerely held religious beliefs and practices of employees cannot be disregarded with impunity," said Mary Jo O'Neill, acting regional attorney of the EEOC's Phoenix District Office. "Employers have a legal obligation to accommodate the religious practices and beliefs of their employees unless it would create an undue hardship on their business operations."

Charles Burtner, director of the agency's Phoenix office, added: "Our investigation concluded that the requested accommodation could have and should have been provided by Alamo. Employers should know that the EEOC will vigorously defend an employee's right to abide by their sincerely held religious beliefs in the workplace."

The lawsuit seek monetary relief, including back pay with prejudgment interest and compensatory and punitive damages. The Commission is also seeking an injunction prohibiting future discrimination and any other curative relief to prevent Alamo from engaging in any further discriminatory practices. The EEOC filed suit only after exhausting its conciliation efforts to reach voluntary pre-litigation settlements.

In addition to enforcing Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits employment discrimination based on sex, race, color, religion, or national origin, the Commission enforces Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in the private sector; the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967; the Equal Pay Act of 1963; the Civil Rights Act of 1991; and the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which prohibit discrimination affecting people with disabilities in the federal sector. Further information about the Commission is available on the Agency's web site at www.eeoc.gov.

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